

County to implement 311 info line

By JULIE DAFFERN
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In an effort to make Webb County more efficient, the county is implementing a 311 information line in six months.

When service begins, county residents will be able to call the line for information about county departments such as Community Action Agency services, rural trash pick-up and jury duty.

The number can also be used for information on the City of Laredo, according to Commissioner Jerry Garza, who is working with SBC to provide the service.

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COUNTY COMMISSIONER JERRY GARZA

“We’re all about making things user-friendly and customer-service oriented,” Garza said.

When implemented, the county will be one of only five government bodies offering the service in Texas, according to Garza. Currently only Dallas, Austin, Houston and San Anto-

nio have a 311 line. Slightly more than 50 cities offer 311 nationwide.

“There aren’t that many municipalities or county’s that are doing it right now,” Garza said. “It’s relatively new.”

Garza added that the new information line should also curb non-emergency calls made to 911.

“They receive about 1,000 calls a month, approximately half of those are not emergencies, so those are the calls we are hoping to reroute to 311 and thereby freeing up the 911 dispatcher to handle emergency calls,” he said.

According to a presentation by Garza during

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an August Commissioners Court meeting, “311 is the city’s ‘customer first’ answer to handling non-emergency calls and request for services quickly, effectively and professionally.”

The county currently has a dispatcher who handles calls to its 523-4000 line. The plan is to send

the calls to 311 to the same personnel, so no additional employees will need to be hired. This will be handled through the Management Information Systems department.

Paul de la Peña, director of the MIS department, said several members of his staff were being

cross-trained for several tasks to be able to take on the extra work.

“I believe that our staff should be able to facilitate those calls,” De la Peña said. “We have people that are diverse.”

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